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SUBJECT: FINNISH EU PRESIDENCY ON EXTRAORDINARY AUG. 1 GAERC

Classified By: a/dcm Gregory Thome, Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A/DCM met with Finnish MFA European Correspondent Jarno Syrjala to discuss the Aug. 1 extraordinary GAERC. Syrjala also offered the latest Finnish EU Presidency thinking regarding a potential international force for Lebanon. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Regarding the GAERC agenda, Syrjala suggested that it will be short, focusing mainly on humanitarian issues in Lebanon and Gaza. At a ministers-only lunch, Finnish FM Tuomioja and Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner will brief on their trip to the region, and EU High Rep Solana may brief on conversations with Secretary Rice in Asia. There is no consensus as to whether the GAERC will issue formal conclusions -- apparently a contentious issue. The UK is currently alone in actively opposing formal conclusions, but most member states agree that hours of debate resulting in a "watered down" set of conclusions serves no purpose, Syrjala said. FM Tuomioja is currently of that opinion, he added.

¶3. (C) Regardless of whether formal conclusions are issued, Syrjala said Solana, Tuomioja and Ferrero-Waldner will likely hold a press conference after the GAERC. There is near-unanimity among member states on the need to reiterate the EU's call for an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon, particularly in response to strong public pressure, he said. They will also likely announce aid packages, and perhaps thank Israel for assuring humanitarian corridors. We questioned the usefulness of simply repeating over and over the call for a ceasefire when conditions on the ground did not seem to warrant it yet. Syrjala said the EU understood the US view in that regard, but emphasized that the EU line regarding this only continues to become firmer. Even the UK, he noted, appeared to be moving in that direction (although not there yet). A/DCM reminded him that the Rome meeting had produced different, compromise language, which he acknowledged. However, he noted that the recent death of three European peacekeepers -- including a Finnish officer -- had hardened even further the insistence, both in Finland and the wider EU, that an immediate ceasefire is crucial.

¶4. (C) A/DCM noted that increasingly divergent opinions between Washington and European partners did little to help the international community move forward together to resolve the crisis. Syrjala acknowledged this, and offered three ideas to help us move forward together. First, he said, productive negotiations (when the time is right) regarding an international peace force will be very helpful. The EU is "unanimous" in its opinion that NATO cannot take the lead, and the GOF appreciates the flexibility the US has shown in this regard. Syrjala reiterated suggestions we've heard from other senior Finns that the GOF -- and most in the EU -- would

welcome a UN or EU force with NATO backing under Berlin Plus. He opined that a French-led force with a strong Muslim element (Turkey or perhaps Indonesia, which whom the EU has had some discussions) could prove the most effective combination.

¶5. (C) Second, Syrjala suggested, the best operational approach might be to scrap UNIFIL altogether and begin with an entirely new force and a far more robust mandate. This would have to include careful diplomacy with the French; they have already asked for a "reinforced" UNIFIL, but appear somewhat flexible on that, he said. Finland believes the force should also have a strong mandate to enforce UN Res. 1559; however, he warned, several other EU member states will become increasingly uneasy the more the concept of 1559 enforcement is incorporated into the new force's mandate.

¶6. (C) Finally Syrjala said, humanitarian assistance could also offer a positive way forward. The GOF and the EU welcome Israel's commitment to assuring humanitarian corridors, and Syrjala acknowledged Secretary Rice's helpful role in this regard during her

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trip to the region. The Commission and several member states are willing to make significant additional financial contributions, he added, which is crucial at a time when European public opinion is demanding a strong EU humanitarian response.
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